



Dreams Beyond Grades

A true story.....

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Author's note

This book is based on a true story of mine with some fiction to it. However, names of some persons and a few other details have been changed to protect identities. The book is not only about a journey of an average guy to be a successful person in life, but also a story of courage, determination and growing up. All chapters are narrated in simple language as a story.

This memoir is dedicated to the youth of India and to inspire them to follow their heart without being distracted by or sucked into the indifferent educational system, social pressure and imposing expectations of the family and the surrounding. It is also dedicated to all parents who compare their child with others forgetting their uniqueness and what he/she is best at.

I am not a writer by profession, which is why I feel that the following pages are better described as a simple story instead of a book.

In this book I have just expressed my own views and thoughts in words. No

offense indeed.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my Brother Situn Meher for always being with me in penning this book's journey and for tossing about some interesting thoughts each time I was stopped by writer's block. Remember? How we laughed together when you narrated the story of your schooldays.

I would also like to thank my beloved Parents who always supported me for every little thing of mine, and reminded me of the nostalgic memories of my childhood to complete the book. I am blessed to have such loving parents.

This book wouldn't have been possible without the support of Bikash Meher, my cousin brother who stood by me even when he was busy with his teaching schedules as a medical college professor.

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Prologue

After a long six day strip to Delhi, I was returning from the Kempegowda International airport, Bangalore. The airport is far off from my house, which takes almost 2-3 hours to reach. Sarcastically some people say Bangalore airport is situated in Andhra, as Bangalore city is not so far from Andhra-Karnataka border. Might be they are true in a certain way.

I took an Airport taxi and started toward my place. The drive to my house itself is

beginning of a pain in ass because of the busy Bangalore traffic and that too in evening of weekdays.

On the way, I was listening to some Kannada music on the Radio Mirchi which was just bouncing over my head because of my language problem. It has been almost 6 years, I have been staying in Bangalore, but I couldn't learn Kannada language yet which always makes me feel bad. Moreover, Bangalore is a friendly cosmopolitan city, where you can find many languages and culture together, and the best part is, you can get into an auto rickshaw or a taxi and reach your destination even without knowing its regional language and communicate with them in either English or Hindi.

I told the driver to play some Hindi track, but unfortunately FM couldn't catch the signal. Rolling down the car window, my wandering eyes gazed out.

Amidst the hurriedly moving images, my eyes caught the attention of a hording that said 'Share your story, Inspire people'; the idea of my story-telling germinated

then.

I reached my house. But the phrase was floating in my head making me think over. Me and my younger brother stay together in a flat at Old Madras Road, Bangalore. His Name is Situn, who is just two years younger to me.

After his engineering, he was working with HP as software engineer located near Electronic city.

He was very caring and possessive about his closed ones and extremely polite in nature. Everyone wondered how a guy like him was single. However, the truth was that neither did he fall in love nor, he wanted to, he had simply decided to concentrate on his career and job. I was probably his big brother cum best friend and he shared everything with me. By age, Situn is younger to me, but many a time she gives me advices and suggestions like a big brother. He takes care of all things at our house. That way, he is more sorted than me and I never grudged that.

I reached home and knocked at the door. He opened the door and went back

inside. When I entered the room, I saw him doing some office work. I was quite tired after the journey and was feeling hungry.

‘What is for today’s dinner?’ I asked Situn.

He thought for some time. ‘Umm, I am planning to order some Veggie stuff from the restaurant nearby,’ he said.

‘Hmm, ok,’ I nodded.

It was then the phrase of the hording came back to my mind again.

‘Situn, I want to know one thing. Will my story help to inspire people around us? What do you say?’ I asked.

‘Yeah of course *dada* (He calls me Dada – elder brother), it’ll help today’s youngsters to dream big. But why are you asking?’ He looked up with eyes narrowing under the arched up brows.

I didn’t say more about it. ‘Ahhh, just like that,’ I snapped his curiosity.

‘Oh, ok. But something’s going on in your mind, I guess. Am I right?’ He asked, dragging me into the conversation.

I became quite for a while.

I looked at his face. ‘I want to write a book about my journey, so that today’s youth can get inspired from it. I want to make people dream big,’ he said, eyes glowing in pride.

‘What?’ He looked surprised.

‘Why? Can’t I?’ I asked.

‘No no, I meant that’s really impressive, go ahead dada. Indeed I would appreciate it,’ he encouraged me.

‘Hmmm, but I don’t know how to write and all. I am not a writer, but I want to share my story with people. I don’t even know how to start.’ I was confused. Writing a novel or any kind of a story, was a thing I could not even imagine in my dreams.

He smiled. ‘Come on dada, it’s not difficult. Just pick up a pen and a bunch of paper and start scribbling. Else you can open your MS word and start keying in over there. That will be easier,’ he said.

I thought for some time determination writ large in my head and decided to write. I opened my laptop. I started thinking how to start a book. All I did was searching on google about “How to write a book?”, “Book writing tips”, “How to start a book?” and random stuff like that . But I didn’t get anything from that to start. My brother saw me thinking and asked. ‘Have you started writing?’ I became blank. ‘Not yet,’ I said. Holding my laptop with an opened blank word pad staring, I thought to have a coffee and then start writing. I have heard that writers need tea or coffee as a stimulant when they write something, quite funny I know. I went to the kitchen to make some coffee for me, I picked up snacks from the cupboard and took some to eat along with the coffee. My brother was just watching all my activities and suddenly asked, ‘Dada, are you really going to write the book right now?’ I could feel the tinge of sarcasm in his boyish tone. I just ignored that. I opened MS Word and just sat on my bed with a black face.

Again I thought for a while. ‘Hey bro, from where should I begin this ya? I asked him sitting on my bed with laptop.

He looked at my face. ‘Well, you should start from our village, where you were born. Just remember mom has told us about our childhood many times, just start from there,’ he said.

I began writing.

Childhood –Days of Innocence

This story starts with a small village named “Chichaiguda” in Kalahandi District. “Kalahandi” is situated in the remote western part of Odisha state , a major district as it is popularly known as “KBK region”, is regarded as the most backward region in India by the planning commission. Around 90% of the people of this region still live in impoverished villages.

Persistent crop failure, lack of access to the basic services and land entitlements, starvation, malnutrition and migration continue to be the ugly manifestation of the

region. Other socio-economic indicators including population composition and density, net irrigated areas, number of hospital beds, and connectivity of villages (due to criss-crossed terrains) to the growth and service centres are also far from satisfactory. Here People don't have any exposure to modernity and hold on to backward values.

It was February 10th, 1989. A big crowd assembled in front of "Bhagirathi Bhawan"; name of our home in "Chichaiguda" village.

Chichaiguda is a very small village of eight hundred people, seasonally cut off from the world by overflowing Hati River, without a proper all-weather bridge, and didn't have any primary hospital or medical centre.

"Bhagirathi Bhawan" was all set to welcome a new born baby. While it was commonplace for childbirth at home in places like Chichaiguda, Father of the baby was not sure his wife would make it through without any medical help. The family's only hope in case of an emergency was Kanchan Mousi (People used to call her as

Mousi) - a nurse, who was staying nearby.

Kanchan Mousi was not just a nurse, she was like a family. Finally, Kanchan Mousi was called to home. Without being late she reached our home and went inside the room. Her arrival meant some relief.

After some time Kanchan Mousi opened the door and said, 'Congratulations! It's a baby boy'. Hearing this, all became so happy and started celebrating.

People of the village kept coming to the house, to see a new born baby boy. Snacks and sweets were distributed all over. That was the day when I was born in that small village.

My father, Mr Santosh Meher was a lawyer and was doing his practice at "Dharamgarh", a small town near our village and my mother, Mrs Tanuja Meher was an unambitious home-maker. The happy and smiling faces of my family members made the environment so beautiful. And the happiest person was my GG, my

grandmother as I called her GG. She is the person whom I love so much in this world which you will understand later in my story.

Suddenly all family members got tensed, because the baby boy was crying incessantly and was not having milk. My mom and GG were also crying seeing me like this. No doctor, no medicine worked for a while.

People called the village *purohit*, the head priest of village, as they still believe in superstitions and rituals. Mr Purohit came and started humming some mantras-hymns & prayers, he asked my GG to bring a book of my late grandfather, who was a lawyer and a most respectable person in the region and head of the village.

GG came with a book of my grandfather and gave that to the Purohit.

Mr Purohit touched that book on baby's hand and suddenly the baby stopped crying. Indeed it was a miracle that defied all logic. By seeing this, the bemused crowd erupted in joy. Mr Purohit told my GG that the baby was the reincarnation of our Mahajan Babu, people used to address my grandfather with respect as Mr. Mahajan.

GG became very happy on learning this, and took me up in her hands and planted a kiss on my forehead. From that day the baby became the most loved and pampered grandson among all grandchildren of GG. I don't know, should I believe this village superstition or not, but yes because of this I became the apple of my family's eye.

Mr Purohit left the house after blessing the new born baby. Celebration followed thereafter seeing the first smile. The discussion about my future was debated and foretold. They wondered what would be the baby become in future.

Oh god! I have not taken a single breath properly on this earth, not even opened my eyes to see the world and all these guys are predicting my future? But who cares about it in our society. Before the birth of a child our parents and family already decide about their kid's future. Same thing happened that time with me, some people said, 'He will be a lawyer like his grandfather and father,' while others said, 'Doctor, Engineer etc.' All the coveted jobs of that time were attributed to me.

I really can't blame anyone for this, because this is how our Indian society is. It is

not the family, but this society who predicts and defines your future, grades in your school/college, your salary, your life style, and your marriage., Infact for everything they just have a suggestion and advice and expect you to live up to it.

They just don't care about you, what you like and what you are. That's the only reason our Indian families are afraid of society before taking any decision about anything in life.

Day by day I was growing with love and affection from my doting family.

I was growing up like any village kid, who likes to bathe in a pond with cows and buffaloes and with the other kids of the village; who walks inside the muddy rice fields to collect snails, runs around to catch hens and cocks, catches fishes from the pond, likes to play with sand and stone instead of dolls, steals mangoes from people's farms, plays on the dry straws of paddies and at the end of the day comes back to rest at home on his GG's shoulder.

My parents were a bit worried about my lifestyle over there, they were not ready to

accept the village lifestyle for their son and wanted a better life and education which was not possible in that small village.

When I became four years old, parents decided to shift to nearby town where my father was engaged in his law practice. I, my father, my mother and my younger brother (In between I got a younger brother as well who is just two years younger to me, by name Situn) shifted to the nearest town called "Dharamgarh," a small town where one could get the basic needs.

I was not ready to move anywhere away from my GG; it was quite difficult and painful for me to stay without my GG whom I loved so much in this world. Even she was not ready to distance herself from her loving grandson.

It was the time of departure from my village; I cried a lot holding tight my GG. I think I had never cried like that ever before. My father took me forcefully with him. Till then, I had never been away from my GG.

I wanted to talk to *papa* and explain to him what GG meant for me, but neither did I

have the words nor was *papa* prepared to listen. And even though I would have known what to say, I wasn't sure how to express what I was feeling. All I could do was cry inconsolably. So I cried, despite my heavy, wet eyes. I cried despite my running nose, and I cried till my throat became hoarse. For some unknown reason, I was hopeful that seeing my terrible condition, *papa* would have some mercy on me. That he wouldn't leave me and take me back home, to the soft cocoon of my mother. But he didn't.

We were about to depart from the gate of our house. I ran straight towards my GG, who was just standing far away from the gate. I clung to her right leg. I was ready to tear it apart, but not let it go. GG couldn't stop her emotion and started crying by holding me tight. She was not ready to leave me.

Papa came towards us and grabbed me away from GG. Well, I kept holding onto GG with all my strength, so much so that, when he grabbed me, my little body with GG got dragged along.

He took me forcibly into the car. I was hanging from his tight arms, above the

ground, paddling my legs in the air desperately. I pulled myself up with full energy, but couldn't. We got into a white ambassador car and the driver started the car in a jiffy without delay. We left "Chichaiguda" village.

On the way I was just staring at the muddy roads, there was something breaking inside me. I saw those mango trees where I used to steal mangos. I saw that pond, I used to bathe in. I saw those village friends waving their hands and saying goodbye to me with sad faces. Sitting inside the car, I thought to myself, 'What would I do without my GG in that new place?'

My eyes were full of tears. Maybe we wish to be friends with elite people in some big cities or metro living that lifestyle, but we really enjoy some good time with those friends we love. Life is simple, but we make it complex by running after what never give us joy, even a fake bravado. The drive to that new place was beginning to seem ominous. The road lined with large trees, spreading their branches covering the place with gloom, as our car makes its way, it makes me want to get down and run. But I do no such thing. I sit and watched my surroundings with my teary eyes.

We came to “Dharamgarh”, but I was really missing my village and my GG a lot. I remembered GG. I remembered her love for me. I wanted to run into her caressing lap. But couldn’t.

We started living in Dharamgarh, a very small, peaceful town situated at the border of Odisha and Chattisgarh state. In spite of being a small town, Dharamgarh was pretty self-sufficient. We started living in a new environment with new people. As far as the primary and secondary education was concerned, there were only four schools, and all were affiliated to Odisha state board including three government schools and one private school. My parents had admitted me to the private school—Saraswati Sishu Mandir.

My father started practicing law in the sub-divisional court and our house was located within the small colony near the court. There were twelve living quarters marked around with the large boundary wall. Most of the quarters were rented by Lawyers.

My Brother Situn was three to four years younger to me, was admitted to “Sishuprarambha”; similar to English medium of nursery, I was getting into Class one in the same school. I still remember one of our oldest pictures in which we were together, giving pose with our school uniform in a small studio near our house on the first day of school in Dharamgarh.

We both started going to school and gradually made friends. We were living in a colony in that town where I made new friends and started going to school with them.

It was a Sunday and Mom had got us ready by the evening. She made us wear the new clothes and applied some Fair & Lovely cream and some talcum powder on our faces so that we look nice and fair. We were getting ready to visit someone’s place in the town for the first time. Like all families we were also told to behave nicely when you visit someone’s place. And that day I, Situn and my mom visited an aunt’s place in the town.